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Investing in special education

Testimony as prepared for delivery by Assistant State Superintendent Paul Manriquez

MINOCQUA – *The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction today released the following testimony, as prepared for delivery, to be provided at an upcoming Joint Committee on Finance listening session on the 2023-25 biennial budget. Gov. Tony Evers' budget proposal, released in February, [provides historic support of the state's public schools and libraries during a time of critical need.](#)*

Hello. My name is Paul Manriquez, and I am the assistant state superintendent for the Division for Learning Support at the Department of Public Instruction. I am here on behalf of State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly to testify in support of increasing the special education reimbursement rate as proposed in the governor's budget.

As I speak today, please think about a child you know sitting in a Wisconsin classroom. Maybe that child has a disability and receives special education services. Maybe they do not. Either way, they are directly impacted by the current special education reimbursement rate, which has been 30 percent for far too long.

Why does this impact children with and without disabilities? When our state does not adequately fund what children need for special education, the money to pay for these important and legally required services has to come from somewhere else. That means transferring money from other places in a school district's budget, like maintenance, staffing, enrichment courses or extracurricular activities. Every day, we hear from administrators from all corners of Wisconsin about this unfair tradeoff. One superintendent recently told us that this is one of the "saddest things that every single district has to work with," and that it gets harder and harder every year.

In 2019, the bipartisan Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding recommended the exact same proposal on the table today: raising the reimbursement rate to 60 percent. It was a good idea then, and it is a desperately needed idea today.

(more)

I know you've heard from families and from educators on this issue, and I'm sure you will hear from more. I hope you're listening to their stories and thinking of that child you know, and I hope you realize what an incredible opportunity you have in front of you. Raising the special education reimbursement rate will improve education for every single child in Wisconsin. And that is how we ensure a strong future for our state.

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